

Galerie

LiveArtfully

Women Shaping
the Art World

CLAIRE TABOURET
at her château as
she prepares to unveil
her windows
for Notre-Dame





“Our number one mission is to preserve the works of art, but that also means preserving them in culture”

AIMEE NG

SARA MESSINGER/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

Aimee Ng at the Frick Collection in front of *Comtesse d'Haussonville* (1845) by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres.

WOMEN

SHAPING THE

ART WORLD

From curators mounting thought-provoking exhibitions to mentors nurturing the next generation of talent, these power players are pushing their fields forward with their passion, drive, and creativity

By Julie Belcove

AIMEE NG

Aimee Ng's first trip to the Frick Collection, the hallowed New York City repository of Old Masters, proved prophetic. "I remember the bright green background of the Bronzino portrait just radiating," she says of that initial visit during high school. Years later, she's still in awe of the 16th-century *Lodovico Capponi*. "The great privilege of my life is that's a painting I now get to visit on a daily basis."

Ng, a Canadian who was promoted to chief curator in November, joined the Frick in 2015 and has had a prominent role in its transformation ever since. When the museum's Fifth Avenue mansion temporarily closed for a major expansion project, she jointly curated the collection's takeover of the Breuer building and then its reinstallation back home three years later.

During the pandemic Ng cohosted *Cocktails with a Curator*, the Frick's wildly popular video series featuring art history lessons and drink recipes that ran for 65 episodes. "They were challenging because you're giving a 20-minute lecture, but we didn't have access to our libraries," she says. "The other thing is, I live in a small apartment with a husband and two kids, so I would be recording at midnight—or 10 a.m. if I kicked them out of the house to go to the park."

Embracing challenge: Accustomed to overseeing shows of centuries-old artists, she helped mount a well-received exhibition of Black contemporary artist Barkley L. Hendricks in September 2023. "It was kind of like being on vacation," says Ng, a onetime painter herself. "Not that it wasn't work, but it offered the chance to imagine this alternate reality."

Defining stewardship: "Our number one mission is to preserve the works of art, but that also means preserving them in culture," she says. "We're making sure that people come with an interest in understanding human history through old things." frick.org



The artist in her studio in Saint Remy, New York, with *¿What Feeds Us?* (2024-25).

SUZANNE JACKSON

When the netting Suzanne Jackson hung around her peach tree in Savannah, Georgia, in the late 1990s failed to stave off the squirrels and possums, she brought the material into her studio. Soon she began to experiment with it, applying acrylic paint and hoisting it into the air, calling on her familiarity with scrims and pulleys from her years as a theater set designer. It was the first of what would become an acclaimed series of luminous painting-sculpture hybrids that incorporate found materials and dispense with the canvas.

“They were saying painting was dead during the ‘80s, and my whole idea was, What can I do?” says Jackson. “Painting is not dead. It’s just that painting is really hard, and a lot of folks are really kind of lazy.”

Jackson is anything but. At 82, she has never been busier. This past spring, she embarked on a monthlong residency in São Paulo, then brought her acclaimed traveling retrospective, “What Is Love,” to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. The show—which debuted at the San Francisco Museum of Art last fall—opens at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in September.

Her art-world stardom has been a long time coming. After studying painting at San Francisco State University, she worked as a ballet dancer, actor, and teacher while making dreamy, translucent abstract paintings. In 1968, she transformed her live-work studio in Los Angeles into Gallery 32, an exhibition space for other up-and-coming Black creatives. She also published two volumes of poetry before heading to Yale for graduate school at age 44. Eventually, she began teaching art at the Savannah College of Art and Design and really hit her stride. She made her New York solo debut at 75 and was a star of the Whitney Biennial five years later.

Artistic overlap: “To me, there’s no separation between food, dance, painting, poetry, music,” says Jackson of her expansive outlook.

Up next: The artist shows no signs of slowing down. Currently, a construction crew is installing drywall in her new studio in Savannah, and she has her sights set on publishing more writing. “I just watched Betye Saar, at 100 years old, dancing. That’s what I think when I look at women artists, like Louise Bourgeois and Howardena Pindell: Women just keep going.” suzannejackson.art

BONNIE BRENNAN

One day in 1987, Bonnie Brennan’s dad was driving her to school in the Detroit suburbs when a news story came on the radio about a sale at Sotheby’s: Someone had paid \$53.9 million for Vincent van Gogh’s *Irises*—a staggering price at the time and the record for an artwork sold in competitive bidding. “I remember thinking, Wow, what an amazing job!” she says.

Just over 37 years later—in February 2025—Brennan was named CEO of Christie’s, the first woman to occupy the corner office on a full-time basis. This past spring, under her watch, the house celebrated a trifecta of milestones of its own, selling Jackson Pollock’s *Number 7A, 1948* for \$181.2 million; Constantin Brancusi’s *Danaïde* for \$107.6 million; and Mark Rothko’s *No. 15 (Two Greens and Red Stripe)* for \$98.4 million—all artist records and a potent signal that the recent market slump may be ending.

“Great works will always find buyers,” says Brennan, whose job is to ensure that Christie’s has both in abundance. “One of my goals is to make sure that we demystify the auction process and welcome the greatest number of people in.”

There was a time when Brennan did not see a viable career path in the art world. Graduating from Northwestern University with a double major in art history and marketing and communications, she went into advertising, writing new-business proposals. She joined Sotheby’s a few years later and rose through the ranks. After a leadership shake-up in 2012, Brennan jumped to Christie’s. One of her favorite aspects of the job is the breadth of categories that pass through the salesroom—from Old Masters to pop culture memorabilia. “In this business,” she says, “you get to be a student every day.”

On diversity: “The scope of contemporary art keeps growing. We want to give voice to female artists, artists of color, underrepresented artists. We’re trying to listen to what the market wants.” christies.com



Bonnie Brennan.

FROM TOP: STEVEN PROBERT; COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ORTUZAR, NEW YORK; COURTESY OF ARGENT; OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF THE PUBLIC ARTS TRUST OF INDIA

“It’s about building culture and making it for everyone”

SANA REZWAN



Sana Rezwan with *Voice of the Blue*, an installation at 2025 Jodhpur Arts Week.

SANA REZWAN

Sana Rezwan was dividing her time between New York City and Jaipur, India, collecting South Asian women artists and sitting on the boards of art institutions, when she had an idea. Art Production Fund, one of the organizations she worked with, commissioned projects in unorthodox locales, such as *Prada Marfa*, Elmgreen & Dragset’s satirical faux storefront on a lonely stretch of desert road in Texas. Why couldn’t contemporary art be brought to India’s ancient public squares?

Rezwan soon launched Jaipur Art Week—which held its fifth edition last winter—followed by a similar seven-day program in Jodhpur. “The city becomes a venue, as opposed to a museum or a gallery, and that’s really exciting,” she says.

A belief that art should be democratic is at the heart of the festivals, so events are free and nearly always open to all. “It’s about building culture and making it for everyone,” says Rezwan of the two programs, which will merge in January to become Site Jodhpur, a seven-week presentation.

Although Rezwan dreamed of being an artist, she forged a career in fashion before earning a master’s at Sotheby’s Institute of Art and finding her way back to the art world. Part of her mission is to build respect for cultural pursuits in her homeland, so she established the Public Arts Trust of India, which offers education, mentorship, and training to young talents in skills such as proposal writing and conducting studio visits. “My name is not on it,” she says. “It’s not a vanity project.” **On perseverance:** “I would go to auctions as a young girl and raise my paddle, and I was advised never to put it down until I won the lot.”

What’s next: “I have a vision of building a little museum and a gallery space as well as art and learning centers.” publicartstrustofindia.org



“There are always two things that we say every artist has: a unique vision and a dedication to their craft”

TRINO VERKADE

Trino Verkade at the Sarabande Foundation in London.

TRINO VERKADE

Alexander McQueen was synonymous with artistry in fashion. The renowned couturier sent women down the runway wearing antlers and programmed robotic arms to spray-paint model Shalom Harlow’s dress in one particularly unforgettable show. Trino Verkade was employee number one—and helped bring many of his wildest brainstorming to fruition. Now, 16 years after McQueen’s death, she is keeping his spirit of experimentation alive via the Sarabande Foundation.

“The idea is very much to support artists, so they don’t have to compromise their creativity,” says Verkade. “There are always two things that we say every artist has: a unique vision and a dedication to their craft.”

McQueen, who grew up working class and was fiercely anti-elitist, left most of his estate to Sarabande but revealed little about his wishes other than his desire to fund scholarships. Under CEO Verkade, the foundation provides need-based aid to students at London’s Slade School of Fine Art and Central Saint Martins. It also rents studio space in its buildings for a price per square foot that’s significantly below market rate. Last year, it received some 800 applications for 32 spots.

Sarabande defines creativity broadly, considering candidates from a wide array of fields, from fashion and jewelry to fine art, dance, and filmmaking—and those who resist being siloed. “That was very much the ’90s—we all mixed together,” says Verkade.

Next up: In a major undertaking, she and her team at the foundation’s gallery, House of Bandits, are curating the art program at the St. Regis London, which is slated to open in Mayfair this fall. Roughly 80 Sarabande creators are producing more than a thousand works for the hotel’s guest rooms and public spaces: There’s a suit jacket by Olubiyi Thomas; crushed, painted cans by Lucy Jagger; carved and gilded flowers by Jo Grogan; and paintings sewn with seeds by Beverley Duckworth.

Ongoing commitment: Verkade is also building community. Funding recipients are welcome to access exhibition space and advice in perpetuity. As Verkade says, “once a Sarabande artist, always a Sarabande artist.” sarabandefoundation.org

“I feel very comfortable looking at architecture and thinking outside the box about how to take over spaces and infuse them with art” VIRGINIA SHORE



Virginia Shore at the National Gallery of Arts in Washington, D.C., with a work by Rachel Whiteread.

VIRGINIA SHORE

When the Obama Presidential Center opened on the South Side of Chicago in June, its campus was dramatically punctuated with 28 commissions from 30 artists, the only contemporary art program of its kind at a presidential library. The woman behind the epic undertaking: curator and art adviser Virginia Shore. After joining the project in early 2019, she devoted seven years to the institution, which includes works by such luminaries as Maya Lin, Martin Puryear, Theaster Gates, and Mark Bradford. The result, according to Shore, is beyond a typical presidential archive or museum dedicated to one man. “This is a cultural hub,” she says.

Shore built her reputation at the State Department’s Art in Embassies program, which she joined as an intern. Rising to chief curator and acting director, she gained invaluable experience developing site-specific installations and bringing exhibitions to U.S. outposts all over the world. Her 25-year career there coincided with an embassy building boom, giving her the opportunity to collaborate with architects and engineers, which came in handy, for instance, when she suggested turning what was intended to be a plain window on the Obama Center’s northern façade into an artwork. “I feel very comfortable looking at architecture and thinking outside the box about how to take over spaces and infuse them with art,” she says.

That architectural element is now Julie Mehretu’s *Uprising of the Sun*. At 83 feet tall, it consists of 35 abstract painted glass panels, the artist’s first execution in the medium—and an undisputed showstopper. Inside, an escalator runs alongside it. “It’s almost like you’re in the work as you ascend,” says Shore. Facing downtown, it is highly visible to oncoming traffic of all types. “I saw it the other day flying in. Her work is a beacon.”

Common thread: “All the artists are socially engaged. I was always reflecting and making sure that the values and the vision aligned with the intent of the center as well as those of Barack and Michelle Obama.” shoreartadvisory.com

LESLEY LAU/THE SUNDAY TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE/NEWS LICENSING. OPPOSITE: KATE WARREN